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What's behind Kremlin crackdown

With SALT II on ice, Russia has less incentive for good behavior, as a dissident crackdown indicates. President Carter is trying to keep the treaty alive, but prospects are poor (below left).

By David K. Willis

Staff correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Moscow

Détente is in tatters. The Moscow Olympic Games are scheduled for July despite the boycott movement. The SALT II treaty is stalled by an anti-Soviet swing to the right in and out of the US Senate. Soviet hopes for lower US trade tariffs are out the window for the moment.

Add all these facts together, and you come up with reasons why the Kremlin has been cracking down hard on Soviet dissidents in the last five months, and why it has reduced Jewish emigration by 25 percent in the last two months.

The crackdown widened and intensified in March with the sudden arrest of an Estonian scientist, Dr. Juri Kuk, on a street in his home city of Tartu March 13. Details were telephoned to this correspondent from Tartu on March 17 by friends. They said Dr. Kuk's wife and two young children were greatly distressed.

The arrest was the strongest move the KGB has yet made against Baltic dissidents, who have been newly active since last August, when 45 signed a "Baltic appeal" calling for independence for Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

At least 11 other dissidents have been arrested in Moscow or in the Baltics since Nov. 1. The most prominent to be seized was the 1975 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dr. Andrei Sakharov. Several other dissidents have been searched, warned to stop their activities, or attacked in print.

As Western diplomatic sources here see it, the Carter administration has lost any leverage it might have had over the Kremlin to ensure that dissidents are treated humanely. The Soviets no longer feel SALT and trade concessions are on the diplomatic boil and about to be granted. "The Soviets want dissidents out of the way before Olympic tourists try to contact them," says one veteran diplomat, "and now they see no real reason to hold their hand."

The latest issue in the Communist Party journal *Kommunist* carries a long article which in part attacks dissidents as spies and propaganda agents for the CIA. It was written by the man who is deputy to KGB chief Yuri Andropov — his first deputy chairman, Semyon Tsvigun.

In turn, all this antidissident activity comes as the Soviet stance on Afghanistan remains blunt and unyielding. Officials here dismiss all talk of a "neutral" Afghanistan as an imperialist "trick." Western diplomats say the Soviets will never accept the idea because to do so would be to signal to Eastern Europe, Mongolia, Cuba, and Vietnam that the Soviet hold over its own communist allies may be weakening. To the aging, conservative, suspicious, and defiant Kremlin, even an inch backward is to be feared, for it may lead to unimaginable

consequences.

To counter Western shortwave broadcasts in Russian about rising Soviet casualties inside Afghanistan, both the armed forces newspaper, *Red Star*, and the party newspaper, *Pravda*, have just published long articles designed to show that Soviet troops are welcomed by the Afghan peasants, and living in comfortable tents with letters and newspapers from home.

In Moscow rumors circulate of coffins returning and families of soldiers grieving: "Have you heard? . . . Do you know? . . ."

The actual number of casualties is unknown. Officially casualties are not mentioned. Neither of the two articles mentioned any. But *Pravda* did indicate that Soviet troops would be needed for a long time to come, and that rebel forces had been organized in the mountains.

For Estonian scientist Dr. Kuk, the arrest in his home city ended for the time being a year and a half of increasingly open dissident activity after a lifetime of conformity, including 12 1/2 years of membership in the Communist Party.

In Moscow in January to give Western correspondents copies of official Baltic protests against the invasion of Afghanistan and the Moscow Olympics (whose yachting events are to be held in the Estonian capital of Tallinn), he was detained and held for three days at a police station before being escorted back to Tartu.

Finally he decided to try to emigrate to Israel. He had gathered all the necessary papers and intended to file them on March 14 but was arrested the day before. Friends who telephoned me said he had been taken to Tallinn for investigation. Charges were under Article 194, Section I, of the Estonian criminal code: anti-Soviet slander.

He could be sentenced to three years in jail, or fined 100 rubles, or sent for one year to a labor camp.

Meanwhile, Mr. Niklus also lost his job late last year. A Tartu court refused to reinstate him. He appealed to a Tallinn court, which ordered a rehearing. That rehearing has been postponed five times in Tartu, while the KGB interrogates his former students at an evening school of languages.

Mr. Niklus said in an interview March 17 he believed the KGB would try to have him declared unfit to teach and get around the Tallinn decision that way.

The KGB has also tightened pressure against Jewish dissidents. Last year more than 50,000 were allowed to emigrate, a record number, as the Soviets tried to soften Senate opposition to the SALT II treaty and to granting Moscow lower tariffs on Soviet-manufactured exports.

But with both issues now bogged down in the détente crisis that followed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviets have cut down on the flow. In the first two months of this year, only 6,139 Jews were given exit visas, down 24 percent from the 8,166 in the same period last year.

Meanwhile, the number of dissident leaders available to talk to Olympic Games visitors is dwindling. The record of arrests since last November includes Dr. Sakharov (banned from contact with the West in the closed city of Gorky), and Helsinki human-rights activists Tatyana Velikanova (Nov. 1) and Malva Landa (March 11).